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## HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH WILD AND STRAY ANIMALS



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**EUSTIS, FL** – Lake County health officials urge residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure. In Florida, raccoons, bats, foxes, and unvaccinated cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals that are at high risk for rabies include skunks, otters, coyotes, bobcats, and stray or unvaccinated cats, dogs and ferrets. Each year Lake County receives reports of rabid animals. In 2018, three rabid raccoons were reported in Lake County. Most recently, a domestic cat was reported positive in the Leesburg area.

“Rabies is a potentially fatal disease. It is important not to handle wild animals, to be aware of unusual acting animals and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies,” said Aaron Kissler, Administrator of the Florida Department of Health in Lake County.

Rabies is transmitted through exposure to the saliva and nervous tissue from a rabid animal through a bite, scratch, or contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth. The Florida Department of Health in Lake County works with The Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Enforcement and The Lake County Animal Shelter in responding to incidents of animal bites, tests animals for rabies through the Department of Health State Laboratory, and quarantines animals as necessary. The Florida Department of Health in Lake County can also advise victims of animal bites where to obtain rabies vaccinations, the only known effective treatment for rabies prevention in humans.

The following are steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones against rabies:

- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Enforcement at 352-343-2101.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- **Do not** handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- **Never** adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- Teach children **never** to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.

- Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets.

Unusual acting animals should be reported to Lake County Sheriff's Office Animal Enforcement at 352-343-2101 for handling. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should call to report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as Lake County Sheriff's Animal Enforcement and their local health department. The contact number to report an animal bite to the Florida Department of Health in Lake County is 352-253-6130.

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The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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